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Scientific and Technical
Intelligence Committee

The Overt Collection of S & T Intelligence

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December 1978

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Contents

	<i>Page</i>
Summary	v
Discussion	
Purpose and Motivations for the Study	1
General Conclusions and Implications	2
Specific Conclusions and Recommendations	4
 Chart	
Overt S&T Intelligence Collection/Reporting and Production System	3
 Annexes	
A. Membership of the Steering Group and the STIC Overt S&T Collection Working Group	9
B. Recommendations of the STIC Working Group	11

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The Overt Collection of S & T Intelligence

Summary

Purpose and Motivations for the Study

Scientific and technological analysis draws heavily on overtly collected information in producing finished intelligence for national security and foreign policy users. Trends in the last few years have tended to increase the importance of the overt collection of S&T intelligence. An increasing number of intelligence tasks and requests have been levied upon the Intelligence Community by the National Security Council (NSC), the President's Science Adviser, the Departments of State and Defense, and others that require more complete and timely S&T reporting than is possible from technical or clandestine collection alone. The Intelligence Community is not well organized for either orderly collection and reporting of overt S&T information or for processing of this information prior to its receipt by analysts. This is in sharp contrast with collection and processing of photography, SIGINT, and nuclear intelligence information. ☐

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In recognition of the need for improvement in overt S&T collection,¹ the Scientific and Technical Intelligence Committee (STIC) in 1977 formed a Working Group (see annex A for membership) to study the capabilities of the US Government for overt S&T collection and reporting, and the ways that these capabilities might be improved. The report of the Working Group is comprehensive and is being published separately.² STIC has selected a number of general and specific conclusions it believes should be highlighted for Intelligence Community (IC) managers and planners. These selected conclusions, together with some recommendations for action by various community elements, constitute the present report. ☐

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Major Conclusions

The major conclusions of this report are:

- The US Government's potential for reporting on foreign scientific and technological developments relevant to US national interests is high, but that potential is presently not being fully realized.

¹ Overt S&T collection consists of the acquisition of intelligence information from public media, observation, government-to-government dialogues, elicitation, and sharing of data openly acquired. The process may be classified or unclassified; the target and host governments as well as the sources involved normally are aware of the general collection activity, although the specific acquisition, sites, and processes may be successfully concealed. ☐

² Annex B contains a summary of all recommendations by the Working Group. ☐

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- The needs of national security consumers and policymakers regarding foreign S&T developments and issues are not being systematically identified and fully articulated to field collectors and reporters, particularly those abroad.
- The basic problems affecting overt S&T collection and reporting are systemic; an increasing amount of foreign S&T information is being collected and reported, but the relevance of that information to the needs of national security and foreign policy consumers remains low.
- The principal overt collectors abroad—the State Department and the Department of Defense (DoD)—do not regularly report on foreign S&T developments of national intelligence interest.
- Several important overt sources available through IC organizations are not being fully exploited for S&T intelligence, that is,

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- Intelligence analysts remain generally uninformed regarding the overt collection systems and, consequently, do not effectively utilize the full potential of the foreign S&T reporting capability that does exist.

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Implications for Policymakers and Intelligence Analysis

The continued inadequate collection and exploitation of overt S&T intelligence by the Intelligence Community would portend limited, and possibly reduced, national intelligence capabilities to adequately support national policymakers. Improvements in the overt collection system are needed, but the nature and extent of the required changes are subject to bureaucratic as well as practical constraints. The adverse implications of failure to adequately use and/or improve overt collection are serious:

- *For policymakers*, these implications include the possibility that major US policies may be formulated on an incomplete or weak understanding of foreign S&T capabilities, and US negotiators may be unable to take advantage of US scientific and technological strength in international negotiations.
- *For the analytical community*, the implications include a possible excessive and increasing amount of analytical manpower being spent sifting the growing volume of low-relevance overt material, and the attendant costs and political risks resulting from increased use of the more responsive technical and clandestine collection systems.

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STIC Actions and Recommendations

This report concludes that key functions must be established or improved if the IC is to utilize fully the various US Government organizations to acquire overtly foreign S&T information on issues of national interest.

- *The needs of national security consumers and policymakers for foreign S&T information should be systematically identified and communicated to field collectors.*

—STIC plans to perform this function by formulating collection guides in selected S&T areas and by providing field collectors with timely collection guidance.

- *The establishment of a coordinated collection tasking system—including common tasking, priorities, reporting and feedback processes—would enhance overt reporting on foreign S&T developments. No overt collection system, per se, exists. STIC recommends that the appropriate IC components (identified specifically later in this report) take the following actions:*

—Implement the DCI's overall planning responsibilities for overt collection (NSCID-2) so that both IC collectors and advisory-tasking reporters are fully informed on national S&T intelligence needs.

—Establish a uniform collection requirement and guidance system for both IC and non-IC (advisory-tasking) collectors and reporters.

—Provide analytical feedback to all overt collectors and reporters from the IC consumers in a way that recognizes and rewards all US Government organizations for their contribution to the national intelligence and national security organizations.

- *The analytical community should provide more explicit collection guidance on difficult technical subjects and more customer-tailored collection tasking on national-level S&T issues so that collectors and reporters can better direct their efforts. This would make more effective use of existing IC overt collection resources (for example, [redacted] and non-IC [redacted]) reporting through the State Department (NSCID-2). In addition, the overt S&T reporting responsibilities of State and Defense must be clarified regarding national intelligence reporting; field-level reporting coordination should be provided to ensure adequate S&T coverage and no unplanned duplication. STIC recommends the following actions:*

—NFIB member organizations should task the various overt collectors more explicitly, tailoring their collection requests to the collectors' technical expertise and/or sources (for example, [redacted])

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—CIA, DIA, and State, with assistance from the Human Resources Committee (HRC), should develop orientation and training courses for both reporting and analytical personnel on various overt collection systems and their S&T reporting potential.

—The NFIB should encourage both IC collection and production organizations to offer technically qualified manpower on a temporary basis to State and Defense units abroad as a practical means of enhancing non-IC reporting on national-level S&T intelligence topics.

—Chiefs of Mission should be encouraged to establish full coordination among all US Government S&T reporting elements within their country of accreditation (other than those under US area military commanders), based on the overall S&T reporting guidance and the national intelligence requirements provided to the mission; DoD overt S&T collectors abroad which are not under the Chief of Mission should be kept informed where appropriate. CIA should ensure that clandestine collection efforts against S&T targets in a country are properly coordinated with the efforts of overt collectors in the field against the same target. ☐

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